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## IGS Poll

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### Author

DiCamillo, Mark

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Institute of Governmental Studies  
126 Moses Hall  
University of California  
Berkeley, CA 94720  
Tel: 510-642-6835  
Email: igs@berkeley.edu

Release #2020-03

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***Sanders opens up a commanding lead in California's  
Democratic presidential primary.***

*The state's Latinos and younger voters are propelling the Sanders surge.*

By Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*  
(c) 415-602-5594

Fueled by the growing support of the state's Latinos and younger voters, Senator Bernie Sanders has opened up a commanding lead over his Democratic rivals in next Tuesday's California's Democratic primary for president.

Sanders is now the choice of 34% of likely voters in the primary, twice the support of Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, his nearest rival who is preferred by 17%. Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg receives 12% and former South Bend Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg is at 11%. Further back are former Vice President Joe Biden at 8% and Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar at 6%. Another 5% of voters are supporting other candidates and 7% remain undecided.

The fractured nature of vote support for Sanders' rivals has big implications with regard to how the state's 415 pledged delegates to the Democratic National Convention are allocated to the candidates. This is because under California's delegate allocation rules a candidate must receive at least a 15% share of the vote statewide or within the state's 53 congressional districts to be awarded delegates. Sanders' current 34% share of the statewide vote virtually assures that he will achieve the 15% threshold not only statewide but across virtually all congressional districts. By contrast, the current support levels of Sanders' rivals place each in jeopardy of falling below this threshold across these constituencies. This situation gives Sanders an excellent chance of capturing the lion's share of the state's 415 pledged delegates.

These findings come from the final pre-primary election *Berkeley IGS Poll* conducted online in English and Spanish February 20-25, 2020 with 6,688 registered voters statewide, 3,002 of whom either have already voted or are considered likely to vote in California's Democratic presidential primary.

### **Trend of likely voter preferences in the California presidential primary**

The latest poll was completed following strong showings by Sanders in the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary, and was in progress as Sanders was racking up a decisive victory in last Saturday's Nevada caucus.

Californians considered likely to vote in the Democratic primary were presented with a complete list of the twenty Democrats whose names will appear on the state's Democratic presidential primary ballot and asked who they would be supporting.

In this setting Sanders is the choice of 34% of the electorate, twice the proportion of his nearest rival, Warren, who receives 17%. Four other Democratic candidates receive significant shares of the vote but each poll below the required 15% threshold to be awarded delegates from the statewide vote. They include Bloomberg (12%), Buttigieg (11%), Biden (8%) and Klobuchar (6%).

Support for Sanders in California has steadily increased over the course of the campaign. By contrast, support for Sanders' main Democratic rivals has been in a constant state of flux. The proportion of voters backing Warren or Biden, each of whom led at different points during the year, has been in decline, while the proportions favoring Bloomberg, Buttigieg, and to a lesser extent Klobuchar, have increased over the past month. Yet, the net effect of these shifts means that none of Sanders' opponents has emerged as a dominant rival to his candidacy in this state.

Table 1  
**Trend of voter preferences in the California Democratic primary for president  
(among likely voters)**

	<b>Late February 2020 %</b>	<b>January 2020 %</b>	<b>Late Nov. 2019 %</b>	<b>September 2019 %</b>	<b>June 2019 %</b>
Bernie Sanders	<b>34</b>	26	24	19	17
Elizabeth Warren	<b>17</b>	20	22	29	18
Michael Bloomberg	<b>12</b>	6	2	--	--
Pete Buttigieg	<b>11</b>	7	12	6	10
Joe Biden	<b>8</b>	15	14	20	22
Amy Klobuchar	<b>6</b>	5	3	2	1
Tom Steyer	<b>2</b>	2	1	*	--
Andrew Yang**	<b>1</b>	4	3	2	1
Tulsi Gabbard	<b>1</b>	1	1	1	--
Others	<b>1</b>	8	14	16	21
Undecided	<b>7</b>	12	9	8	11

\* less than 1%

\*\* While Yang has dropped out of the race, his name still appears on the state's primary election ballot.

### **Sanders' growing support fueled primarily by Latinos and younger voters**

The expansion of Sanders' base of support in California has come in large part from the state's Latinos and its youngest voting segments. Sanders is now the choice of 51% of the state's rapidly growing Latino constituency, up 13 points from January. In addition, Sanders holds a huge advantage over the field among voters under age 40, capturing 61% of the preferences of those age 18-29 and a 53% majority of voters age 30-39. The poll estimates that these two groups will comprise about 30% of the overall Democratic electorate.

Sanders has also expanded his lead among Democratic primary voters who describe themselves as very liberal in politics, and now receives 50% of their votes, up from 41% in January. He also continues to hold a solid lead among male voters, especially those who are non-college graduates.

Sanders vote support is also well-distributed geographically across the state, receiving between 28% and 38% of the vote within each of California's seven major regions.

As was observed in previous polls, Warren continues to lead the field among female college graduates and remains competitive with Sanders among the California's white non-Hispanic voters who will likely comprise over half of the Democratic electorate. However, she trails Sanders by wide margins among the state's ethnic voters, as does each of the other candidates.

Bloomberg's strongest constituency is among voters age 65 or older, where he holds a narrow lead. However, he does very poorly among voters under the age of 50, where he polls in the low single-digits.

Bloomberg also does well among the approximately one in three of the state's Democratic primary voters who describe themselves as moderate or conservative in politics. However, he receives relatively little support from the party's much larger constituency of liberal voters. Interestingly, both he and Buttigieg receive some of their highest levels of support from Californians who report having already voted. This means that both candidates have sizable bases of support from which to build upon as they approach the final days of the election.

The latest poll finds Biden the former front-runner in June with only single-digit support in California. The only major subgroups where he now achieves double-digit voter support are with political moderates, seniors age 65 or older, African Americans, and voters in the Central Valley, but even among these segments Biden does so just barely.

The only major voter segment where Klobuchar polls in the double digits is with voter age 65 or older.

Table 2								
Likely voter preferences in California's Democratic presidential primary across the subgroups								
	<u>Sanders</u>	<u>Warren</u>	<u>Bloom-berg</u>	<u>Butti-gieg</u>	<u>Biden</u>	<u>Klo-buchar</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>Undecided/ no answer</u>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Total statewide</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Party registration</b>								
(.82)* Democrats	32	19	11	11	9	6	5	7
(.18) No Party Preference	40	11	16	7	6	6	5	9
<b>When vote cast</b>								
(.20) Already voted	34	11	19	16	7	7	5	1
(.80) Likely to vote	34	19	11	9	8	6	4	9
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>								
(.57) White non-Hispanic	25	23	13	12	8	9	2	8
(.27) Latino	51	8	10	8	9	2	4	8
(.05) African American	38	14	11	12	10	**	7	8
(.09) Asian American	37	13	13	7	9	4	10	7
<b>Age</b>								
(.13) 18-29	61	13	2	8	4	1	5	6
(.17) 30-39	53	18	5	8	3	1	5	7
(.13) 40-49	35	23	6	11	9	3	5	8
(.27) 50-64	27	18	12	12	9	6	7	9
(.30) 65 or older	16	16	23	11	11	12	4	7
<b>Gender</b>								
(.43) Male	37	13	13	11	9	6	5	6
(.57) Female	31	21	11	10	8	6	4	9
<b>Gender by education</b>								
(.22) Male non-college	45	9	12	11	8	4	6	5
(.22) Male college graduate	29	17	14	11	9	8	6	6
(.31) Female non-college	37	15	13	10	8	5	4	8
(.25) Female college graduate	23	28	10	10	8	8	3	10
<b>Political ideology</b>								
(.30) Very liberal	50	28	4	4	4	3	2	5
(.35) Somewhat liberal	28	20	10	14	10	8	3	7
(.35) Moderate/conservative	25	5	21	12	10	7	9	11
<b>Region</b>								
(.27) Los Angeles County	38	19	11	8	10	4	5	5
(.09) San Diego County	37	17	12	7	8	7	3	9
(.07) Orange County	35	17	14	10	8	7	1	8
(.12) Other Southern California	35	12	10	13	6	7	5	12
(.15) Central Valley	33	14	11	13	9	5	5	10
(.26) San Francisco Bay Area	28	19	15	11	8	8	4	7
(.04) Other Northern California	29	26	9	14	1	9	5	7

\* denotes proportions of the overall Democratic primary electorate that each segment comprises

\*\* less than ½ of 1%

### **Sanders in position to capture the lion's share of California's delegates to the Democratic National Convention**

California will be sending a total of 494 delegates to the Democratic National Convention in Milwaukee in July, by far the most of any state. Of these, 415 are pledged delegates awarded to the candidates based on voter preferences in the state's Super Tuesday primary election, while 79 are unpledged "superdelegates."

Pledged delegates are awarded not only from the statewide election results but also from each candidate's standings within each of the state's 53 congressional districts (CDs). This means that from a delegate perspective, California's presidential primary is the result of 54 separate elections rather than just one.

In addition, delegates are awarded only to candidates receiving at least 15% of the vote within each jurisdiction. And because nearly twice as many delegates are awarded from the state's district elections (271) than from the statewide results (144), this puts a premium on candidates being able to reach the 15% vote threshold across a broad range of CDs.

An attempt was made in the latest poll to assess the breadth of a candidate's support across the state's CDs. This was done by counting the number of CDs in which the leading candidates are now achieving at least a 15% share of the vote. This is made possible by the *Berkeley IGS Poll's* large sample size of primary voters, over 3,000, and because the CD of each voter can be identified from their voting record.

Yet, even with the poll's very large sample, the number of likely Democratic primary voters polled within each CD is relatively small, averaging about 55-60 voters per district. This means that estimates of voter preferences within each CD are very imprecise. Nevertheless, unless there are large regional differences in voting preferences, which finds does not appear to be the case for most of the candidates.

Even though the poll's CD-level estimates have relatively small sample sizes, averaging 55-60 voters each, from a statistical standpoint a candidate receiving a 34% share of the statewide vote, as Sanders is now doing, would be expected to be in a very strong position to reach the 15% threshold to be awarded delegates in virtually every CD. And, a review of the poll's presidential preferences across the 53 CDs finds that this is indeed the case.

By comparison, a candidate like Warren, who is receiving a 17% share of the statewide vote, would likely attain the 15% threshold to be awarded delegates in some but not all of the CDs. And, this too is the case as the poll finds her reaching the minimum threshold in slightly more than half of the state's CDs.

On the other hand, candidates receiving only a 12% or 11% share of the statewide vote, as Bloomberg and Buttigieg are now doing, would not only fail to capture any delegates from the statewide vote, they would be expected to fall below the 15% threshold in most of the district elections. Results of the poll bear this out, with each candidate reaching the 15% minimum threshold in only a little more than a quarter of the state's CDs.

This exercise demonstrates that the breadth of Sanders' support across the state makes it likely that Sanders will capture the lion's share of California's 415 pledged delegates not only statewide but across the district elections as well.

**Changing perceptions about which Democrat has the best chance of beating President Trump in the November general election**

One factor that has dominated discussions throughout this year's Democratic presidential campaign relates to the question of which Democrat stands the best chance defeating President Donald Trump in the November general election. The Berkeley IGS Poll included a question about this in each of its last three statewide surveys.

The results indicate that Democratic primary voter perceptions about this have changed considerably over the past month. In both its November 2019 and January 2020 surveys, pluralities of the state's Democratic electorate considered Biden as the candidate best positioned to defeat the President in the fall.

However, the latest poll the proportion of Californians naming Biden as the Democrats' strongest candidate against Trump has fallen twenty points from January to just 12% in the latest poll. Poll leader Sanders is now cited most with 34%, with Bloomberg a distant second at 17%.

Views about which candidate has the best chance of defeating the President in the fall are closely correlated with which candidate voters are backing, especially among supporters of Sanders, Bloomberg and Biden.

Table 3			
Voter perceptions of which Democrat has the best chance of defeating President Donald Trump in the November 2020 general election (among likely Democratic primary voters)			
	Late February 2020 %	January 2020 %	November 2019 %
Sanders	34	26	22
Bloomberg	17	7	--
Biden	12	32	29
Warren	9	10	13
Buttigieg	4	3	6
Klobuchar	3	2	--
Others	--	4	13
Undecided	21	16	17

**Democratic primary voters hold differing perspectives about the attributes important to them when assessing the presidential candidates**

The poll finds that the state's Democratic primary voters hold differing perspectives about the attributes important to them when assessing the presidential candidates. And that there are wide differences in perspectives depending on which candidate a voter is supporting, their age and their race and ethnicity.

For example, the electorate divides almost evenly when asked whether it is more important to back a presidential candidate whom they perceive as having the best chance of defeating President Trump (53%) versus one with whom they most agree on the issues (47%).

Voters backing Sanders' candidacy attach high priority to supporting a candidate with whom they most agree on the issues. Nearly two in three Sanders' supporters (64%) say this, compared to just 38% among the rest of the Democratic electorate.

There are large generational differences in views about this as well, with younger voters in the Democratic electorate far more likely than their elders to say it is more important to choose a candidate who is most aligned with them on the issues than one whom they perceive may have the best chance of defeating President Trump in the general election.

The Democratic primary electorate also is divided with regard to the stance that a presidential candidate should take on major policy issues facing the nation. In this regard 55% of Democratic primary voters say they prefer candidates who advocate making major changes in policy even if such changes would be difficult to be approved by Congress, while 44% support candidates who advocate for making incremental policy changes that would be more likely to be enacted. Another 1% have no opinion.

Sanders' supporters once again hold very different views about this than the rest of the Democratic electorate. Among Sanders supporters nearly nine in ten (86%) say they prefer a presidential candidate who advocates for major policy changes even if they are more difficult to enact, more than twice the proportion who say this among all other voters in the electorate (40%).

The views of Democratic primary voters under age 40 and its ethnic voters are much more in line with Sanders about this than other voters, with majorities saying they prefer a presidential candidate who advocates for major policy changes over one taking a more incremental approach.



<b>Table 4</b> <b>Preferences of likely Democratic primary voters regarding the</b> <b>the characteristics of a presidential candidate they feel are more important</b>				
	Has the best chance of defeating Trump %	Candidate who most agrees with me on the issues %	Advocates major policy changes even if they are harder to enact %	Advocates incremental changes that are more likely to be enacted %
<b>Total likely voters</b>	53	47	55	44
Sanders supporters	36	64	86	14
All other voters (net)	<u>62</u>	<u>38</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>60</u>
Warren supporters	48	52	66	33
Bloomberg supporters	81	19	30	70
Buttigieg supporter	47	53	25	74
Biden supporters	80	20	31	69
Klobuchar supporters	68	32	14	86
Support other candidates	42	58	41	55
Undecided voters	69	31	47	51
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>				
White non-Hispanic	57	43	48	52
Latino	46	54	67	33
African American	41	59	72	27
Asian American	52	48	63	37
<b>Age</b>				
18-29	29	71	75	25
30-39	37	63	72	28
40-49	43	56	62	38
50-64	63	37	51	49
65 or older	68	32	38	61

*\* Differences between 100% and the sum of percentages for each subgroup equal proportions with no opinion*

**About four in ten Democratic primary voters feel less optimistic about their party's chances against President Trump now than at the start of the campaign**

Democratic primary voters are also split when asked whether they are now more optimistic or less optimistic of the party's chances of defeating President Trump than they were at the start of the campaign. Statewide, one in three likely voters (33%) say they are now more optimistic than they were at the start of the campaign, but a somewhat larger proportion (39%) are less optimistic. Another 28% report no change.

Sanders' backers are the only constituency who on balance feel more optimistic about their party's chances of defeating the President in the fall, with 48% saying they are now more optimistic and 23% less optimistic. This contrasts with the views of voters backing each of the other Democratic candidates, pluralities of whom say they are now less optimistic about their party's chances of defeating Trump than they were at the start of the campaign.

Table 5 Are you now more optimistic or less optimistic about the Democratic Party's chances of defeating President Trump than you were at the start of the campaign?			
	More optimistic %	Less optimistic %	No change %
<b>Total likely voters</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>28</b>
Sanders supporters	48	23	29
All other voters (net)	<u>25</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>28</u>
Warren supporters	26	38	36
Bloomberg supporters	30	52	18
Buttigieg supporters	20	47	32
Biden supporters	29	50	21
Klobuchar supporters	16	55	29
Support other candidates	27	53	20
Undecided voters	22	45	33

\* Differences between 100% and the sum of each candidate's supporters equal proportions with no opinion

**Sanders's supporters less certain than other Democrats about backing the party this fall should he fail to become the nominee**

Nearly eight in ten of the state's Democratic electorate (79%) say they are "absolutely certain" that they will support the Democratic Party in the general election even if their preferred candidate is not the nominee. However, a somewhat smaller proportion of Sanders' backers (68%) say this than do supporters of each of the other leading Democrats.

Table 5 If your preferred candidate does not win the Democratic nomination, how certain are you that you will support the nominee of the Democratic Party (among likely voters in the Democratic primary)			
	Absolutely certain %	Fairly certain %	Not certain %
<b>Total likely voters</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>
Sanders supporters	68	16	16
All other voters (net)	<u>84</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>
Warren supporters	95	4	1
Bloomberg supporters	77	11	12
Buttigieg supporter	88	8	4
Biden supporters	81	14	5
Klobuchar supporters	87	7	6
Support other candidates	58	7	35
Undecided voters	80	10	10

### **Each Democrat currently bests Trump in the general election by wide margins**

Californians who are considered likely to vote in the November general election were asked who they would support for president in a head-to-head match-up between each of the six leading Democratic candidates and President Trump. In each case, the Democratic candidate is currently preferred over the President in California by wide margins ranging from 24-28 percentage points.

Table 6			
California likely voter preferences between the leading Democrats and President Trump in the November general election			
	Democratic candidate	President Trump	Undecided
	%	%	%
Sanders vs. Trump	59	31	10
Warren vs. Trump	58	32	10
Bloomberg vs. Trump	54	30	16
Buttigieg vs. Trump	58	30	12
Biden vs. Trump	58	31	11
Klobuchar vs. Trump	57	30	13

### **About the Survey**

The findings in this report are based on a *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley. The poll was administered online in English and Spanish February 20-25, 2020 among 6,688 registered voters statewide, 3,002 of whom were likely voters in California's Democratic presidential primary.

The survey was administered by distributing email invitations to random samples of the state's registered voters. Samples of registered voters with email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., derived from information contained on the state's official voter registration rolls. Prior to the distribution of emails, the overall sample was stratified by age and gender in an attempt to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population.

Once the survey questionnaire and email invitations had been finalized, they were translated into Spanish. Each email invited voters to participate in a non-partisan survey conducted by the University and provided a link to the IGS website where the survey was housed. Reminder emails were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt out link was provided for voters not wishing to receive further email invitations.

To protect the anonymity of survey respondents, voters' email addresses and all other personally identifiable information derived from the original voter listing were purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. In addition, post-stratification weights were applied to align the sample of registered voters responding to the survey to population characteristics of the state's overall registered voter population. Likely voters were identified based on a voter's interest in and stated intention of voting in the upcoming statewide primary election and factoring in their history of voting in past elections.

Sampling error estimates from the survey are difficult to calculate precisely due to the effects of sample stratification and the post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that results from the sample

of likely Democratic presidential primary voters have a sampling error of approximately +/-2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Detailed tabulations reporting the results to each question included in this report can be found at the *Berkeley IGS Poll* website at <https://igs.berkeley.edu/igs-poll/berkeley-igs-poll>.

### **Question wording**

*(IF ALREADY VOTED:* The following is the list of the candidates whose names appeared on the California Democratic primary ballot for president. For whom did you vote for president? *(IF LIKELY TO VOTE:* The following is a list of the candidates whose names will appear on the California Democratic primary ballot for President. If the Democratic primary for president were being held today, for whom would you vote?)

When making your decision about whom to vote for in California's Democratic presidential primary, which (was) (will be) more important to you – choosing the candidate who most agrees with you on the issues or choosing the candidate with the best chance of defeating Donald Trump in November?

Which of the following characteristics do you prefer in a candidate for president – someone who advocates for major policy changes, even if these policies might be difficult to get through Congress or someone who advocates for incremental policy changes that would be more likely to be approved by Congress?

Are you now more optimistic or less optimistic about the Democratic Party's chances of defeating Donald Trump in the November presidential election than you were at the start of the campaign?

If your preferred candidate does not win the Democratic Party nomination, how certain are you to support the nominee of the Democratic Party in the November presidential election against incumbent Republican Donald Trump?

*(ASKED OF LIKELY VOTERS IN THE NOVEMBER 2020 GENERAL ELECTION)* If the candidates in the November general election for President are Democrat (Joe Biden) (Bernie Sanders) (Elizabeth Warren) (Michael Bloomberg) (Pete Buttigieg) (Amy Klobuchar) and Republican Donald Trump, for whom would you vote if the election were being held today? *(PAIRINGS PRESENTED TO VOTERS RANDOMLY)*

### **About the Institute of Governmental Studies**

The Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) is an interdisciplinary organized research unit that pursues a vigorous program of research, education, publication and public service. A component of the University of California system's flagship Berkeley campus, IGS is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system. IGS's acting co-directors are Professor Eric Schickler and Associate Professor Cristina Mora.

IGS conducts periodic surveys of public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion and generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. The director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll* is Mark DiCamillo. A complete listing of the reports issued by the Berkeley IGS Poll go to <https://igs.berkeley.edu/igs-poll/berkeley-igs-poll>.